

PUBLIC SAFETY



PRESS RELEASE

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State Fire Marshal Provides Parents with Youth Fire Intervention Programs

JEFFERSON CITY, October 30, 2006—Nationwide more than half of all intentionally set fires are started by youths, this trend continues to alarm fire safety officials.

“Missouri is not immune for these national statistics,” Cole said. “Although it may be true many children start fires out of curiosity, they may not understand the true danger of fire, both emotionally and physically,” said State Fire Marshal Randy Cole. “A parent should not simply believe this is a phase and ignore the situation.”

Cole believes an avenue is needed for parents to seek assistance on how to deal with a child exhibiting fire setting behaviors. Parents may be reluctant to seek assistance for a variety of reasons, but the goal of a fire prevention coalition is to decrease fire setting behaviors through prevention education and is not designed or intended to place a child into the courts system.

“I believe it is essential the State Fire Marshal’s Office play a key role in the identifying and developing youth fire prevention coalitions. Our goal is to identify prevention teams throughout the state, provide training to team members and establish consistent youth fire prevention intervention programs statewide,” Cole said. “Team members from various disciplines such as mental health, social services, juvenile justice, family services, law enforcement and of course, fire service would be available depending upon the situation.”

Earlier this spring a \$6,000 grant was awarded to the State Fire Marshal’s Office by the National Association of State Fire Marshals to assist state efforts in establishing juvenile fire prevention coalitions. According to Fire Marshal Cole, this funding will be used to develop intervention training programs and provide training on how to implement

and establish area coalition teams. The base training program will be largely modeled after a program utilized by the St. Louis based Burns Recovered Support Group (BRSBG). Nearly ten years ago BRSBG initiated a youth fire prevention program and has since refined their program to the point that other coalitions are using components as a model.

The State Fire Marshal's Office began this initiative last year by hosting a training program in Jefferson City. As a result of last year's efforts, a limited number of juvenile fire prevention coalitions began forming in various areas of the state. Listed below are current team points of contact and the areas in Missouri in which they provide juvenile fire prevention programs:

St. Louis area (Counties of St. Louis, St. Charles, Franklin, Warren, Lincoln, Jefferson)

Linda Hansen – Burns Recovered Support Group (314-997-2757)

Mary Emge – O'Fallon Fire Protection District (314-997-2757)

Gary Rieth – Burns Recovered Support Group (314-878-1892 x 220)

Sheila Frost – Eureka Fire Protection District (636-938-5505)

Sedalia area – Cindy Harrell – Sedalia Police Department (660-826-8100 or 660-826-8044)

Kansas City area (Jackson County and surrounding counties)

Tom Wade – Independence Fire Department (816-325-7134)

St. Roberts/Ft. Leonard Wood area

Chuck Fraley – St. Roberts Fire Department (573-596-0886)

Bob Sperberg – Ft. Leonard Wood Fire Department (573-596-0131)

Lake of the Ozarks area

Chris Bachman – Mid-County Fire Protection District (573-346-2049)

Greene County/Springfield area

Ben Basham – Springfield Fire Department (417-864-1511 or 417-864-1500)

Parents are encouraged to learn key danger signs if their child has shown an interest in starting fires. If your child is exhibiting fire setting behavior, you and your family are at a higher risk. The odds double that you will experience a fire in your home if this situation exists.

What to look for....

- Child has “accidentally” started more than one fire;
- Child lacks the understanding of fire's destructiveness;
- Child shows an interest in matches or lighters;
- Child has trouble making friends;
- Child has difficulty adjusting to traumatic life changes (death, divorce, moving);
- Conflict within the family;
- Child has fighting and other behavior problems at school/home;
- Child has temper tantrums resulting in property damage or harm to people/animals;
- Child has a hard time feeling or expressing guilt.

The State Fire Marshal's Office is striving to establish trained teams in other areas of the state to ensure all parents have accessibility to such a valuable resource. The National Fire Protection Association indicates 85 percent of juvenile fire play goes unreported.

To contact the Missouri Division of Fire Safety please call 573-751-2930 or you may visit the Division's web site www.dfs.dps.mo.gov.

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